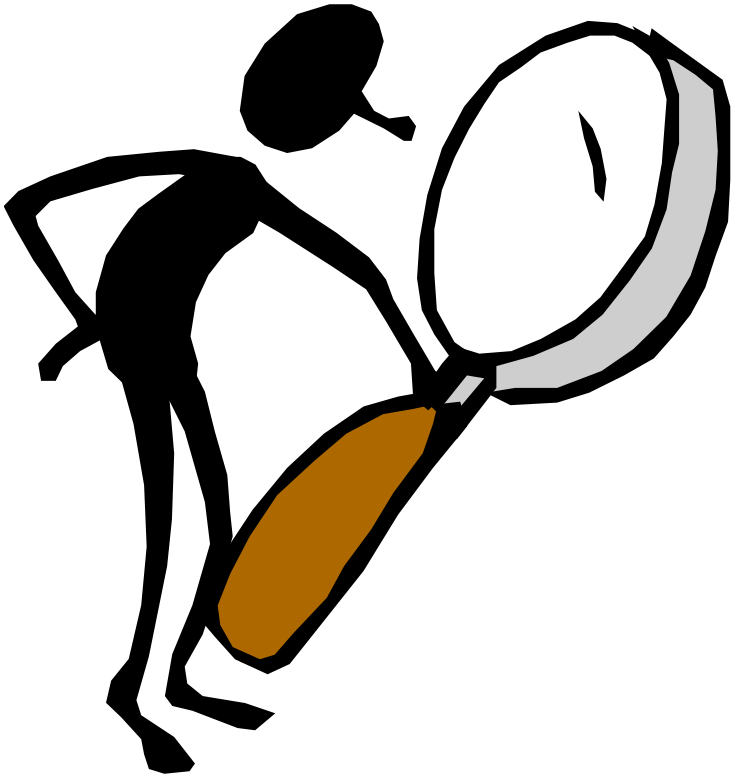
School, Community, and Student Assessment



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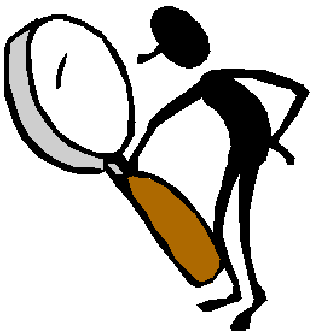


One of the key factors for a successful community service-learning experience is building healthy relationships. These relationships include, but are not limited to, the instructor and student, the instructor and community partner, and the community partner/mentor and student. In the case of a group project, relationship building is also essential among all participants. Students who have the opportunity to build healthy, working relationships with other students and adults will be much more likely to have a successful community service-learning experience.

The assessment process is the first step to building a trusting relationship among the student, instructor, and community partner. It begins by identifying the strengths, interests, and abilities, as well as the challenges, of the student who may potentially become involved in community service-learning. The assessment process should also identify potential opportunities (and challenges or barriers) for learning within the school and throughout the community.

School Assessment

Schools Build Assets is designed to be flexible so that schools and community organizations can shape it to meet their individual needs. It is important to begin the process by asking key questions to identify the policies, practices, and programs already in place that will help students succeed in the school setting. Assessing your school systems' needs, capacity, and readiness will help to determine the extent to which a suspended and expelled program would benefit students.

If the answer to most of the assessment questions suggests that an alternative program would be both beneficial and possible, the next step is to begin thinking about the logistics of implementing an alternative program. As you proceed through this manual keep in mind the type of program that would best fit your school and your available community resources. To help your planning process, consider the following questions:

- Will the program remain on-site at the school campus or will it be off-site in a community setting?
- Wherever it is located, is staffing available?
- How often, and for how long, will students attend the program?
- Which curriculum will be used? Will it focus on lifeskills, core academics, career development, or all three?

Sample school assessment tools are available in the Tools section of this chapter.

- How will academic support be provided for students?
- What percentage of the program will be curricula-based and how much will focus on service-learning?
- Will students complete their community service-learning projects as a group or work individually?
- How often will students work on projects, or how many projects will students be required to complete for their service-learning requirement?
- Will meals and transportation be provided for students, if needed?

Community Needs and Resource Assessment

Assessing Community Readiness

It is also important for the success of the program to assess your community's readiness, existing needs, and available resources for community service-learning projects. The following questions, adapted from Search Institute's *Healthy Communities Healthy Youth Tool Kit* (1998), can help with the assessment of your community's readiness for this project.

- What are the most important issues facing this community?
- How ready is the community to face these issues?
- Have you worked with youth to get their feedback and ideas on launching a community service-learning project in your community?
- Have you made efforts to be inclusive of diverse populations and sectors of your community?
- Do you have access to funding or other financial support?
- Have you networked with key community leaders for their reaction to starting a community service-learning project?
- Have you drawn on the resources and expertise within your community, such as government agencies, youth-serving organizations, schools, faith communities, neighborhoods, businesses, and health care systems, to take part in the planning process?

Sample community assessment tools are available in the Tools section of this chapter.

Available Support

The last two questions will help you begin to assess the real support available for a program specially designed for suspended and expelled students. If school-community partnerships are lacking, it will be important to begin building support throughout the community. It will take planning and concentrated time and effort to develop positive, supportive, working partnerships. In many cases, it is simply a matter of asking for community support.

Once there are several positive and supportive relationships in place, begin forming a small advisory team. This team will provide valuable expertise, guidance, support, and structure to your program.

Student Assessment

When working with students who have been suspended or expelled, the problem behaviors they demonstrate may be obvious. Traditionally, that is where assessments have begun. Often there has been documentation of their academic and/or behavioral challenges within the school setting. Schools may have developed an Individual Education Plan (IEP) or Individual Program Plan (IPP) for the student. Students may also have had interactions with outside agencies such as law enforcement, diversion, or social services.

Implementing a strength-based approach to assessment requires asking the necessary questions to determine how well the student is doing right now. You may need to ask the following:

- How is this student doing emotionally, cognitively, behaviorally, academically, physically?
- What are the personal challenges being faced each day?
- Which coping skills are being utilized to survive day-to-day life?

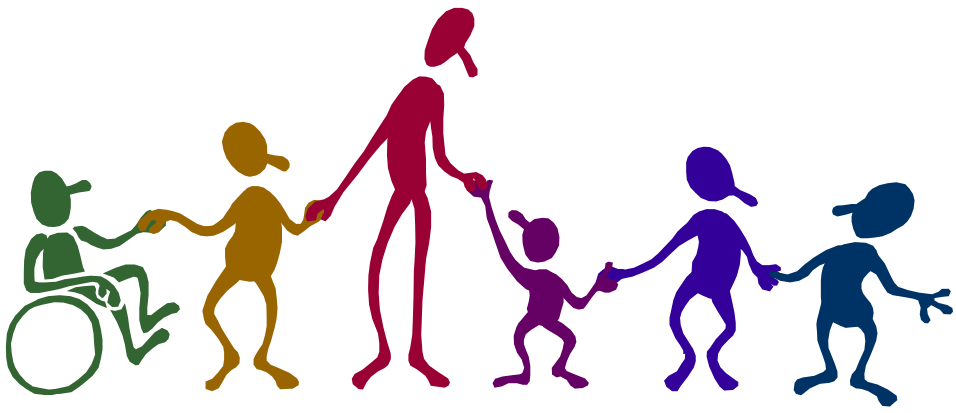
Sample student assessment tools are available at the end of this chapter.

Naming these challenges and recognizing the skills and behaviors needed to overcome them may bring a measure of understanding for both the student and teacher.

Begin a strength-based approach to assessment by identifying and naming the student's skills, abilities, and interests. Encourage the students to name their own strengths and abilities. This can help change their personal perspective from problem-focused to strength-based. The information gleaned from this personal assessment becomes the basis for identifying and developing a community service-learning project that will meet the specific interests, talents, and skills of the student.

The Purpose of Student Assessment

- Understand their current situation
- Learn who they are
- Build upon their strengths



Basic Guidelines for Strength-Based Student Assessment

1. View youth as resources, not as problems.
2. Always address strengths first.
3. Think broad-based: recognize interests, talents, skills, support.
4. Use people-first language.
5. Demonstrate cultural appreciation.

1. View youth as resources vs. youth as problems.
Strength-based community service-learning shifts the traditional view from "youth as problems" to "youth as essential resources" in the community. The following table illustrates this paradigm shift.[1]

Traditional View	Youth as Resources
• Youth utilize resources • Youth are passive • Youth are consumers • Youth need help • Youth are recipients • Youth are victims Adapted from the National Youth Leadership Council, 1990	• Youth act as resources • Youth are active • Youth are producers • Youth offer help • Youth are givers • Youth are leaders Adapted from William A. Lofquist, 1987

2. Always address strengths first when conducting a student assessment.
While youth often cross the "radar screen" when they display some type of high-risk behavior, a strength-based assessment attempts to view *all* youth in light of their talents, skills, and abilities. Naming their strengths *before* acknowledging the challenges they face allows for a more balanced assessment of the youth early in the process. This lays a hopeful foundation for success.

3. Recognize broad-based interests, talents, skills, and support.

- **Students with varying academic abilities**
  All students, regardless of their talents and abilities, can benefit from, and contribute to, community service-learning. The students' diversity of talents and abilities enriches and expands the possibilities for, and benefits from, community service-learning experiences.

- **Students of all ages—from childhood through adolescence**
  Early childhood is an important time to instill a foundation of caring and service to others. Their sense of curiosity about their world brings excitement and enthusiasm

for participating in projects that benefit others. Community service-learning can help build a sense of compassion and caring for others and give them the opportunity to act on these values.

With adolescence comes a greater sense of self-identity. Young adolescents are geared to address issues affecting their personal world: families, schools, neighborhoods, and faith communities. Effective community service-learning for this age group can help them discover new interests and talents, give them hands-on experience in solving problems, and allow them to interact and build relationships with other youth and adults.

Older adolescents have the ability to understand broader social issues. They can empathize with other people, and appreciate the need to think of long-term solutions to problems.

- **Students facing physical, mental, or emotional challenges**
  Students with disabilities are recipients of many services and are seldom seen as community resources. Allowing them to participate in community service-learning opportunities is a way to empower them to have an active role in the school and community, and allows them to be a helper rather than the one receiving help.

- **Youth who live in high-risk situations**
  Youth who are viewed as "outside the mainstream" or "at-risk" can benefit greatly from community service-learning. Typically thought of as recipients of services, they also have skills and abilities that can be tapped as resources in the community. Community service-learning has the potential to strengthen many of the skills these young people will need in future employment and family life: responsibility, reliability, punctuality, the capability to see a project through to the end, and the interpersonal skills to work well with others.

  Because of their past experiences with being viewed as "problems" these young people may demonstrate mistrust issues. Building a personal relationship with these students is key to recruiting their involvement and making them feel welcome. Following are some of the essential elements for building trusting relationships with these students.

  - Create an environment where all young people feel safe, accepted, and valued for their contribution to the group.
  - Include students in the process of identifying issues and concerns they would like to address.
  - Establish clear boundaries and expectations for behavior.
  - Challenge students to use their unique gifts and talents to contribute to others.
  - Increase the students' responsibilities as they experience early successes.
  - Invite responsible adults to serve as role models and mentors.[2]

4. Use people-first language.

Inappropriate use of gender, ethnic, or racial bias is deemed unacceptable in our culture today. Yet, the use of disparaging vocabulary is still heard when referring to those who suffer from a mental or physical disability. Persons with disabilities are often viewed as being afflicted with, or victims of, a disability. Focusing on the disability devalues the individual's strengths, skills, and abilities. The use of inappropriate labels perpetuates stigma toward individuals, which, in turn, may cause lower self-esteem, isolation, and a reluctance to seek help when needed. Stigma also fuels prejudice and discrimination in society.

People-first language overcomes the negative labeling of those affected by certain conditions. It acknowledges the individual first, and recognizes that the condition is only one part of the whole person. For example:

- Replace "disabled person" with "person who has a disability" to recognize a person's strengths and abilities aside from a personal challenge they face.
- Use "person with a mental illness" rather than " mentally ill" to acknowledge that the person is more important than his/her diagnosis.
- Replace "criminal" with "formerly incarcerated" to remove the temptation to define someone by his/her past.
- Replace "suspended or expelled students" with "students who have been suspended or expelled" to refrain from describing the students by their academic status.[3]

5. Demonstrate cultural appreciation.

One of the critical components of the assessment process is identifying and respecting the student's cultural identity. Cultural groups may be defined in terms of race, ethnicity, language, religion, socio-economic class, age, sexual orientation, profession, physical ability, political party or affiliation, hobby, or any number of other identifying characteristics.

An extensive resource listing for cultural appreciation topics is included at the end of this section.

Over the years, the terminology on this topic has changed more than once. The terms "multiculturalism," or "diversity," or "cultural tolerance," or "cultural competence" have all been used in the past. In this document the term *cultural appreciation* is used because that term best communicates what we strive to achieve--not just tolerance or competence, but genuine appreciation of culture as a strength.

Cultural appreciation is a way to show respect and connect positively with others, which is key to this program. When we appreciate individual cultures, we better appreciate and understand the people within those cultures.

A full assessment of culture would also include recognition of a student's family structure (e.g. single-parent, multi-generational, number of siblings), living environment (e.g.

transient, rural, isolated, affluent), and traditions (e.g. eating meals together, playing together, family rules).

6. Assess the whole student.
Keep in mind as you conduct student assessments that the "whole student" is what's important. While you will be assessing his/her specific needs and available strengths as part of this process, you will also need to understand his/her culture, home environment, personal values, and goals for his/her future. This is not about solving a single problem, but rather developing an overall plan of action to promote student success. It will be important to include the following elements as you tailor the ***Schools Build Assets*** program to fit individual students or populations of students. A comprehensive plan will guide both schools and students to a successful outcome.

This is not about solving a single problem, but rather developing an overall plan of action to promote student success.

Critical elements of a strength-based *Schools Build Assets* program

- Assess students' strengths and use those strengths as a way to engage the students in what interests them.
- Provide academic support throughout.
- Develop meaningful community service-learning partnerships and empower students to learn through this instruction method.
- Encourage students to set personal goals for learning.
- Offer enhanced discussions and activities to build critical life skills.
- Invite and encourage parent and family involvement.
- Encourage personal reflection on their participation in community service-learning and the skills and knowledge they learned in the process.
- Conduct outcome evaluations.

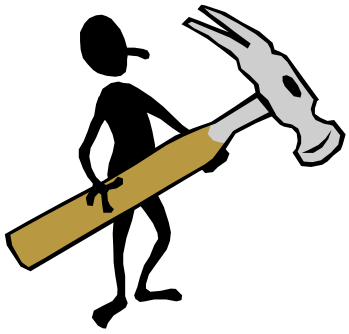
7. Develop a comprehensive plan.
A comprehensive student assessment plan is designed "with the end in mind." The plan may include community service-learning, transitioning, skill building, life-skills training, vocational training, obtaining employment, continuing education, or creating an independent living plan. All of these factors must take into account the individual student's needs, preferences, interests, skills, academic achievements, and challenges.

Follow these steps in designing and implementing a comprehensive student plan.

1. Assess the student's needs, interests, or preferences for future education, employment, and adult living, and set future goals in these areas.
2. Identify, explore, and try out transitional placements that match the student's assessment and vision.

3. Provide community service-learning experiences related to future goals.
4. Instruct the student in the academic, vocational, and adult living skills needed to achieve transition goals, including self-determination.
5. Identify and provide the accommodations, supports, and related services the student needs.
6. Coordinate with adult services organizations and help families identify resources and natural supports.
7. Provide or plan for follow-up support once the student develops independence through a transition activity or graduation.

TOOLS



Student Assessment Tools:

The most personal, in-depth process of student assessment would involve a one-on-one interview process with the student. While that would be the ideal scenario, in reality, time and personnel constraints may make that impossible to achieve.

The Tools section of this chapter includes several assessment forms to use in conducting a strength-based interview of your student. The student assessment forms may be used during an interview, or the student may complete the form and then review the results with the program coordinator.

The questions included on the "Reflecting On My Strengths" form are based on the eight building blocks associated with the 40 Developmental Assets identified by Search Institute. These questions are simply a tool to help your student identify the personal strengths, sources of support, and life skills he/she currently possesses.

1. ***Schools Build Assets*** Student Information Form – developed by first year pilot projects and project coordinator.
2. Forma de Información de Schools Build Assets (***Schools Build Assets*** Student Information Form—Spanish Version) -- developed by first year pilot projects and project coordinator.
3. ***Schools Build Assets*** Youth Self Assessment Form – developed by first year pilot projects and project coordinator.
4. Evaluacion de Juventud de Schools Build Assets – (***Schools Build Assets*** Youth Self Assessment Form—Spanish Version) -- developed by first year pilot projects and project coordinator.
5. Strengths Discovery Worksheet – Region III Behavioral Health Services.
6. Reflections On . . . (Support, Empowerment, Boundaries and Expectations, Constructive Use of Time, Commitment to Learning, Positive Values, Social Competencies, Positive Identity) *Great Places to Learn, Search Institute, 2000.*

7. ***Schools Build Assets*** Suggested Student Assessment Questions, developed by Prevention Pathways.

School Assessment Tools:

1. Initial Tool for Mapping Who's at the School – *UCLA School Mental Health Project, Addressing Barriers to Learning, Volume 10 Number 2, Page 5. Spring, 2005.*
2. Evaluating Asset Building in Your Organization, *Handout 13. Healthy Community – Healthy Youth Officer Guide, 1999, Lutheran Brotherhood. Adapted from Pass It On! Ready to Use Handouts for Asset Builders, Search Institute, 1998.*
3. How Ready is Your School for Service–Learning? *Handout # 8*, *The Points of Light Foundation, 1997.*
4. How Ready Is Your Agency/School for Service-Learning Discussion Questions. *Handout # 12*, *The Points of Light Foundation, 1997.*

Community Assessment Tools:

1. Assessing Your Community's Readiness – *Healthy Communities-Healthy Youth Tool Kit, 1998 by Search Institute, Minneapolis, MN. 6–11 and 6-12.*
2. Community Strengths and Challenges – *Healthy Communities- Healthy Youth Tool Kit, Search Institute, 1998.*
3. How Ready is Your Agency for Service-Learning? – *Handout # 10, The Points of Light Foundation, 1997.*
4. Discussion Starter Questions for Building Service – Learning Partnerships – *Handout # 17, The Points of Light Foundation, 1997.*
5. Youth Service Opportunity Worksheet, *Handout # 9, The Points of Light Foundation, 1997.*
6. Sorting Out the Service-Learning Options -- *Handout # 7, The Points of Light Foundation, 1997.*

Cultural Appreciation Resources

Broken Promises, (33 minute video), Chariot Productions, Boulder, CO, 1990.

Dealing with Difference: Opening Dialogue About Lesbian, Gay & Straight Issues. (35 minute video), Human Relations Media, Mt. Kisco, NY. 2001.

Eleanor W. Lynch and Marci J. Hanson, *Developing Cross-Cultural Competence: A Guide for Working with Children and Their Families,* Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co., Inc. 1998.

End Broken Promises, Mend Broken Hearts, (24 minute video), National Association for Children of Alcoholics, Rockville, MD., 1998.

First People of the Plains Cultural Adaptation of STEPS—Simple Tools Employing Prevention Skills. Pride-Omaha and the Nebraska Department of Education. Cultural adaptation by Prevention Pathways, Inc. and representatives of the First Nations of the Plains, 2003.

Ruby K. Payne, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*, Highlands, TX: aha! Process, Inc., 2001.

Kelly Huegel, *GLBTQ: The Survival Guide for Queer and Questioning Teens*, Free Spirit Publishing, Minneapolis, MN, 2003.

Helping Kids Succeed—Alaskan Style, written by and for Alaskans, Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute, 2000.

I Am Alcohol—Healing the Wounded Warrior, (30 minute video), Duval House Publishing, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, 2000.

Living a Lie: The Alcoholic Family, (30 minute video), Human Relations Media, Mt. Kisco, NY, 1999.

Aisha Muharrar, *More Than A Label: Why What You Wear or Who You're With Doesn't Define Who You Are*, Free Spirit Publishing Inc., Minneapolis, MN, 2002.

A Provider's Introduction to Substance Abuse Treatment for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Individuals, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2001.

L. Brendtro, et al. *Reclaiming Youth at Risk: Our Hope For Future*, Bloomington, IN: National Education Service.

María Guajardo Lucero**,** *The Spirit of Culture: Applying Cultural Competency to Strength-based Youth Development*, Denver, CO: Assets for Colorado Youth, 2000.

University of Maryland Diversity Database, (website), <http://www.inform.umd.edu/EdRes/Topic/Diversity/>. Accessed August, 2005.

Annye Rothenberg, *Understanding and Working with Parents and Children from Rural Mexico: What professionals need to know about child-rearing practices, the school experience, and health care concerns*. Menlo Park, CA: CHC Center for Child and Family Development Press, 1995.

Thomas A. Jacobs, *What Are My Rights?* Free Spirit Publishing Inc., Minneapolis, MN, 1997.

SOURCE REFERENCES

1. *Youth Service: A Paradigm Shift*, Service Learning: Putting the Pieces Together conference manual, Section 4: Youth Voice, July 27, 2005.

2. *An Asset Builder's Guide to Service-Learning*, (Minneapolis, MN, Search Institute, 2000) p. 38-39.

3. *APA Online*, American Psychological Association website. <www.apastyle.org/disabilities.html>. Accessed August 23, 2005.

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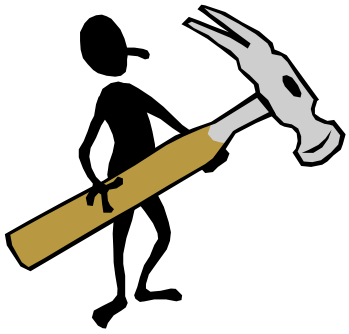

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